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A LANGUAGE-EXERCISE IN DRAMATIZATION

EMMA SIEBEL

No material presented for a language-exercise and no form of language-work has awakened in the children a more intense interest or provoked them to greater effort than have the stories of the gods and the Trojan war, and especially the writing of the play which follows.

The exercise is classwork, and all the children are represented, some contributing more than others; all, however, working with earnestness and each doing his part.

There was quite a heated discussion as to the subject to be chosen—some favoring the “Wedding Feast,” others contending that that would be too simple, that it would only necessitate allowing the characters to say “in their own words” what the story had told them. They wished to “make up” their play, and the suggestion that we write on “Laomedon’s Broken Promises,” that being a story from which “a good lesson could be learned,” carried the day. I had some misgivings as to the outcome, but would not discourage their enthusiastic effort.

The story of Cinderella, so familiar to all, was acted out to give them the “play-idea” and to familiarize them with the terms “exit,” “enter,” “act,” “scene,” “speech,” “action,” etc. We then spent one lesson “practicing,” as they said, “the language of the gods,” and another in changing sentences, “to make them sound more poetical.”

The suggestion to substitute “Persons of the Play” for “Cast of Characters” came from a little girl who thought that “we are only children, and we want it to be all our own.” They then selected the characters needed, deciding that we could easily add others should we have need of them.

They wished to know why Neptune and Apollo had been banished to earth, and when the stories had been told them, they unanimously decided that Mt. Olympus with its “golden palaces,” and Jupiter in the act of banishing the offending gods would be a beautiful and effective scene with which to open the play. In

this scene there was quite a difference of opinion as to Apollo's entering with "bowed head," some insisting that he would feel that his offense against Jupiter was justified. It was finally decided, however, to let him enter in this way, as, being so beautiful, it would "make every one feel sorry for him." "He should go out," said one, "playing the lyre, as he is the god of music." "Oh, no," said another, "do you think he would feel like playing?" "Then," suggested a third, "let us say, 'softly playing the lyre,' as soft, sad music would express his grief for his son and sadness because he had to leave Olympus."

The second scene, they decided, must be the meeting of Neptune and Laomedon, as the audience must hear Laomedon make the promise which he afterward breaks.

The mountain-side with Neptune at work was the best suggestion offered for scene iii, and it immediately found favor. They were quick to see that it would offer an opportunity to show in Neptune's first speech that he was sorry for what he had done, and that "we must always pay in some way when we are not satisfied with what we have." This scene afforded them great pleasure, and they made special effort to have the language "poetical" as there were "no mortals, only gods speaking."

There was no difference of opinion as to scene iv; all agreed that it must represent the completed walls and the Scaean Gate. "That," thought one of the boys, "will be a beautiful scene, and a good place for Laomedon and the gods to meet, when they ask for their reward." Some thought that Laomedon might really have felt that Neptune did not deserve the reward as he had been helped by Apollo, but the great majority scornfully rejected this, insisting that "when anyone has made a promise, it must be kept, there must be no excuses." All thought, however, that Laomedon must have feared to refuse the god outright, and that "people of that kind always do try to make excuses."

Act II, scene i, was the most difficult part of the work. The first part of it was developed in this way:

"What shall be our next scene?"

"It should show the sea-shore, a crowd of people and Laomedon's daughter ready for the sacrifice."

"Why should this be represented?"

"It will be a beautiful scene." "I think it will show the Trojans how Laomedon is to be punished." "It will be the best place to let Laomedon make his promise to Hercules."

"Would what happens in this scene follow shortly after what happened in the last?"

"No, this would be years after."

"How do you know this?"

"The story tells us that the monster devoured one maiden a year, and that at last the lot fell on Hesione, Laomedon's beautiful daughter."

"How will the audience know this, since they do not know the story?"

"We will say at the beginning of the scene, 'Some years after' (later)."

"What division can we make here, then, in the play?"

"This can be the beginning of the second act."

"Who will be the persons in this scene?"

"Laomedon, because he will want to be near his daughter to save her if he can." "Hesione must be there." "There must be many people, because all the Trojans know of it." "The dragon must be there, too."

"Why will you have the dragon?"

"He must come up from the sea to devour the maiden."

"Would you like to see this?"

"Oh, no!"

"Would the audience enjoy it?"

"I think not, but how would they know about the dragon if they do not see him?"

"Who can tell us what to do?"

"We can have him behind the curtain, or only pretend to have him, and some one can tell the audience."

"Will the player tell it to the audience?"

"No, people on the stage only talk to one another."

"To whom can the story be told—to one of the Trojans?"

"No, they all know of it." "It must be told to a stranger."

"Will it be a stranger from one of the places near Troy?"

"No, he should come from a far-away country."

"Who, then, must be added to this scene and to the 'Persons of the Play?'"

"We must take away the dragon and put in the stranger."

"Will merely the word 'stranger' do?"

"I think it would sound well to say, 'A stranger from a foreign shore.'"

"The stranger" was accordingly added, and the "dragon" regretfully dropped. Having overcome this difficulty, the "Trojan's" story was easily composed, and the climax of the scene, "Honor to great Hercules," etc., gave great satisfaction.

In Act II, scene ii, the sympathy of some went out to Lao-

medon. They thought he would really have cause to fear Jupiter's anger were he to give up the steeds, and suggested that Hesione's hand might be offered to Hercules as a fitting reward.

Act II, scene iii, again presented the problem of telling the audience of a harrowing scene which could not be presented. They had learned to solve the problem, however, and the suggestion was soon offered to let servants running from the palace call to passing Trojans, who, of course, would not know what events were taking place in the castle.

The concluding lines of this scene were their supreme effort; they were determined that the last lines should be "poetry," and many and varied were the suggestions and criticisms made before this last difficulty was overcome.

The completed task was a source of great pride to the class, *all* feeling that they had worked faithfully and well. The fact that it had served to bring out the powers of the less able pupils was evidenced when one, whose work had always been below the average and whose interest, during one of the lessons, seemed centered in something upon his desk, brought up, when reprimanded for inattention, the lines:

And I, the god of the silver bow,
Will help thee, if thou so dost wish—

adding that he "might have gotten the other two lines," had he been left undisturbed.

LAOMEDON'S BROKEN PROMISES, OR THE REVENGE OF THE GODS

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

*Written by the pupils of the Fifth Grade (Room 1), Twenty-Seventh District
School, Cincinnati, Ohio*

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Laomedon,	. . . . .	King of Troy
Neptune,	. . . . .	God of the Sea
Podarces,	. . . . .	Son of Laomedon
Hesione,	. . . . .	Daughter of Laomedon
Jupiter,	. . . . .	Father of Gods
Apollo,	. . . . .	God of Music, Sun, and Poetry
Hercules,	. . . . .	A Hero
A Trojan.		
A Stranger.		
Followers of Hercules, Servants, Trojans.		

ACT I—SCENE I

Mt. Olympus—Palace of Jupiter (Jupiter seated on his throne), Neptune.

Jupiter: Thou hast tried to dethrone me, exalt thyself, and rob me of my throne and power.

Neptune: Nay, not so, great Jupiter.

Jupiter: How darest thou dispute what I and all the gods well know! Thou shalt now pay the penalty for this offense by serving a mortal, King of Troy, for one long year. (*Rises.*) Go, now, and do my bidding and come not again into my presence until thy task is completed or I will deprive thee of thy power. (*Exit Neptune, enter Apollo, with bowed head.*)

Jupiter: Knowest thou, Apollo, why I have brought thee here?

Apollo: Aye, great Jupiter, I know that I have displeased and angered thee, but grief for my beloved son has almost maddened me.

Jupiter: Thy sorrow gave thee no right to injure another. For this deed I now banish thee from Mt. Olympus and the presence of the gods to serve for a time a mortal, King Admetus. (*Exit Apollo, softly playing his lyre.*)

Apollo: Farewell to Mt. Olympus and its palaces of gold,
My chariot and its fiery steeds I now no more behold,
I see no more Aurora, fair goddess of the morn.
Once happy as the other gods, but now I am forlorn.

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE 2

The beautiful city of Troy. (Laomedon driving slowly along in his chariot. Enter Neptune, who steps up to the chariot.)

Laomedon: Who art thou, who darest to step so boldly up to my chariot?

Neptune: Thou knowest me not, oh, King; I am Neptune, great god of the sea. I have displeased Jupiter, our great father, and he, as punishment, has banished me from Mt. Olympus to serve thee for a year. What task shall I perform for thee?

Laomedon: Oh, great Neptune, I have long wished for walls to surround and protect my beautiful city. For mortals this would be a task of many years; but if thou wilt fulfil my desire I promise thee rich rewards.

Neptune: Be it so, Laomedon, thy wish shall be granted; soon strong walls will protect thy city.

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE 3

A mountain-side. City of Troy in the distance. (Neptune at the task of tearing a heavy stone from the mountain-side—sighing as he works.)

Neptune: This task seems endless! Oh, were it but completed! Had I been satisfied with the power given me and not displeased great Jupiter

I might even now be in the banquet halls of the gods, feasting on ambrosia and nectar. (*Stops suddenly, listening intently.*) What heavenly sounds do I hear? The strains seem to herald the approach of Apollo. They seem to soothe my weary spirit. (*Looks eagerly in the direction from which the sounds come. Enter Apollo, playing his lyre. He slowly approaches.*)

Apollo: Greetings to thee, Neptune. Why do I see thee at this heavy task?

Neptune: I return thy greetings, fair Apollo. Thy beautiful melody comforts and cheers me. Thou knowest well that I was banished from Olympus to serve for a year the mortal, King Laomedon. To build walls around his city is the task he has set for me. It is an endless one, but rich rewards await me when it is completed.

Apollo: Knowest thou that I, too, was banished from Olympus and sent to serve Admetus, King of Thessaly? My task is finished and gladly will I help thee at thy heavy labor.

And I, the god of the silver bow,
Will help thee if thou so desire,
I can so charm the stones, in row,
They will dance to the strains of my lyre.

Neptune: Oh, Apollo, to show my gratitude to thee, thou shalt receive a portion of the rich rewards that await me, for,

I cannot enough my gratitude show,
Beautiful god of the silver bow. (*Curtain.*)

SCENE 4

Walls of Troy, showing the Scaean Gate. (Laomedon and his attendants driving out of the Scaean Gate, admiring the walls.)

Laomedon: What a grand structure! Such beautiful walls no mortal could have built. I now defy my strongest and fiercest enemy. My greatest foes must yield to me. (*Enter Neptune and Apollo.*) Lo! here come Neptune and Apollo. (*Salutes the gods.*) Greetings to ye, fair and noble gods. Your work has been well done and ye shall be my honored and welcome guests until the wrath of Jupiter is appeased.

Neptune: For thy offered hospitality we thank thee, but if thou wilt grant us the promised reward we will gladly depart.

Laomedon: When I made my promise to thee it was to be a reward for heavy labor. Thy work has been lightened by Apollo. Ye gods have all that can be desired; what can you want from a mortal? Beside, were ye not sent by Jupiter to serve me? Would not his wrath fall upon me were I to reward thee for a task done at his bidding?

Neptune: King of Troy, I see that thy word is not sacred to thee. As a god I will not dispute with thee, but thou shalt feel my wrath and power. (Curtain.)

ACT II—SCENE I

Some years later. Sea-shore. Laomedon's daughter ready to be sacrificed. Laomedon, soldiers, and people of Troy. Stranger from a foreign shore.

Stranger (to one of the Trojans): What mean this great gathering of sorrowing people and this beautiful maiden ready for the sacrifice?

Trojan: Knowest thou not of the dreadful sacrifice we must make every year?

Stranger: Is it a sacrifice demanded by the gods?

Trojan: Aye, stranger, and one that each year brings a great burden of sorrow to some one. Laomedon, our king, once broke a promise to the gods. For this Neptune sent up from the sea a great monster who devoured many of our people. In great fear and distress we fled to the temple, where the oracle announced that the monster would be satisfied to devour one maiden each year. To this we agreed. Each year one of our beautiful maidens has been delivered to this dreadful sea-serpent, and now the lot has fallen on beautiful Hesione, daughter of Laomedon. The king, in great sorrow, has sent out heralds to proclaim to the people that a great reward awaits the one who will slay the monster and save Hesione. (*Confusion among the people.*) But see! It is too late! Even now they are chaining Hesione to the rock and none has come to her rescue. But, lo! who comes here in such haste? Let us press forward and see. (*Enter Hercules, breathing hard. Steps up to Laomedon.*)

Hercules: Laomedon, great King of Troy, I have heard through thy heralds of thy daughter's great peril. Grant me the four immortal steeds received from King Tros and the monster shall be slain and thy daughter saved.

Laomedon: The steeds shall be yours! Save my daughter! (*Breathless silence for a few moments. Then a great cheer arises from the throng.*)

People: Honor to great Hercules! Hesione is saved! The monster is slain! (Curtain.)

SCENE 2

Court of Laomedon's castle. Laomedon and attendants. Hercules.

Laomedon: Thou hast the monster braved,
And my daughter, Hesione, thou hast saved.
Thou art great, a hero grand,
Would I could give thee Hesione's hand.

Hercules: For the great honor thou art willing to bestow upon me I thank thee, but the immortal steeds thou didst promise me will be a rich enough reward.

Laomedon: My anxiety for my beloved daughter was so great that it made me give a hasty promise. The horses were a gift from great Jupiter to my grandfather Tros, and I would have cause to fear the wrath of the Father of Gods were I to part with them.

Podarces: Oh, my father, if thou didst make this promise thou shouldst fulfil it.

Laomedon: No son of mine need give me advice.

Hercules: Thou hast broken thy word to me.

As to Neptune, great god of the sea,
And if the wrath of Jupiter thou dost fear,
Thy broken promise to me shall cost thee dear.

(*Curtain.*)

SCENE 3

Courtyard of Laomedon's castle. (Hercules and his followers entering the castle.) Podarces, Hesione, several servants. (Cries of distress coming from the castle. Servants fleeing from the castle.)

First Servant: Our king, Laomedon, is dead!

Second Servant: Where shall we flee for safety! Hercules in his anger has slain our noble king and all the royal family.

Trojans: To the rescue! Our king and the princes are being cruelly slain! (*Trojans press into the courtyard. Hercules appears at the castle gate with Podarces and Hesione.*) Back, Trojans! It is the great hero, Hercules.

Hercules: Trojans, ye have heard what has happened. So must all pay the penalty who break a promise to the gods. Podarces I have saved as he appealed to Laomedon to keep faith with me.

Podarces: Oh, great Hercules, what shall be our fate?

Hercules: Hesione shall remain, but thou Podarces, must leave with me.
(*Hesione weeps, and kneels at Hercules' feet.*)

Hesione: Oh, Hercules, wouldst thou but hearken to my prayer to take me and leave my brother, Podarces, to rule over our beloved city of Troy.

Hercules: Thy prayer would e'en please the gods above,
As "Priam" bought back by a sister's love;
Thy brother, Podarces, here shall remain
And over the home of his fathers shall reign.

(*Curtain.*)